

NEWS Release

For Immediate Release

Topic: June Flood Raises Questions
About Specific Health Effects
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Gulf Coast residents with early summer flooding face possible health hazards while putting homes and workplaces back together, according to public health officials.

The Department of Health cautions residents to protect their personal health and safety from potential hazards that usually occur during a flood and its aftermath

“After a flood, the physical devastation to a community is obvious,” said State Epidemiologist Dr. Mary Currier. “Flooding can bring with it sewage contamination, which might contain pathogens. These pathogens cause diarrhea and other diseases if a person gets the contaminated water in his mouth.”

She continued, “Both outdoor cleanup, with the use of power tools and chain saws by people who don't often use them, and indoor cleanup which can include the risk of puncture wounds or scrapes from uncovered nails might lead to injuries.”

Outbreaks of communicable diseases after floods are unusual, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that if an individual receives a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil or saliva that person should have a doctor or health department determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary based on individual needs.

According to Mississippi Emergency Management Association (MEMA) officials, flooding is Mississippi's number one disaster. Flood victims should use caution when re-entering a flooded home.

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“Flooding might have swollen doors tight,” said MEMA Director Robert Latham. “When the entrance must be forced open because of swollen doors, accumulated mud, or bulged floors, try to enter through a window or other opening.”

MEMA offers homeowners these precautions when returning to homes after a flood:

- Do not eat food that has come into contact with flood waters.
- Do not handle live electrical equipment in wet areas.
- Have an expert check all equipment before returning it to service.
- Ask the gas company to check your home for leaks and to turn the gas on properly.

"To ensure the safe and speedy recovery of the citizens along the Gulf Coast in the affected counties, MEMA is working closely with the Department of Health on health-related issues that result from flooding and severe weather," said Latham.

Another health concern among Gulf Coast residents after severe flooding is mold.

“One should worry about possible mold growth *only* if the contamination is extensive,” said Currier. “Allergic persons vary in their sensitivities to mold, both as to amount and type needed to cause reactions.”

When mold appears in large quantities, they can cause allergic symptoms similar to those caused by plant pollen. Sources of indoor moisture that can cause problems include flooding, backed-up sewers, leaky roofs, damp basement or crawl spaces, and constant plumbing leaks.

Health Department Epidemiologist Bruce Brackin said the simplest approach is this: “If you can see or smell mold, you have a problem. It is important to quickly identify and correct any moisture sources because mold can cause not only health effects in some sensitive individuals, but also structural damage to one’s home.”

The Mississippi State Department of Health does not recommend testing as the first step to determine whether a mold problem exists. Mold cleanup is usually considered one of the housekeeping tasks of the private citizen, along with roof and plumbing repairs, sweeping and house cleaning.

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“Mold is the visible symptom of the underlying moisture

problem,” said Brackin. “Unless the source of moisture is removed and the contaminated area is cleaned and disinfected, mold growth is likely to reoccur.”

For more information, the public can log onto Mississippi’s public health agency web site: www.msdh.state.ms.us/epi/mold.htm or call the Environmental Protection Agency’s Information Clearinghouse phone number at 1-800-438-4318 and check the EPA web address, www.epa.gov/iaq.

Latham noted that flood insurance is not part of one’s home owner's insurance policy but is separate. For more information on flood insurance, residents should contact MEMA at 601/960-9973.

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